DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 350 CG 006 245

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TITLE The University's Response to Drug Involvement.
INSTITUTION Association of Coll. Unions-International, Ithaca, N.Y.; Lehigh Univ., Bethlehem, Pa.
PUB DATE 24 Mar 71
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Association of College Unions International in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, March 20-24, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS College Students, *Drug Abuse, Drug Addiction, *Health Education, Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, Marihuana, *Student Behavior, *Student College Relationship, *Student Needs, Student Personnel Services, *Student Problems

ABSTRACT

The author feels that the university's response to drugs should be based on contemporary philosophy of student-university relationships which emphasize the primacy of learning and student development in an atmosphere of academic and perscnal freedom. This response should be two-fold: (1) education, and (2) provision of help to those involved in drugs. An informal, eclectic approach to education is recommended and several suggestions offered: (1) drug information courses and/or dissemination of informaticn to administrators, faculty, residence hall advisors, etc., (2) the informal use of low-pressure publications, and (3) cooperation with students, previously involved with drugs, who want to help. A close scrutiny of existing services and their effectiveness in responding to student needs is urged. Other areas broached include: (1) confidentiality, (2) the use of extra-university agencies, clinics, drop-ins, etc., (3) the university's role vis-a-vis current drug legislation, and (4) the appropriateness of institutional discipline. (TL)

ED047350

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Presented at

Association of College Unions - International

The Greenbrier, White Sulfur Springs, West Virginia

24 March 1971

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CG 006 245

The University's Response to Student Drug Involvement

Preston Parr

There is no single or easy statement that can be made on the University's response to student drug involvement, for the character and extent of drug use, the hard information available on drugs, and some of the significant attitudes of law enforcement authorities and of society in general have changed appreciably since the mid-sixties, when drugs first became a concern on the campus. It is possible, however, to ask some basic questions about institutional purposes and philosophy, the relationship of the student and the University, and the place and responsibilities of both in the larger society. And it is then possible to come up with provisional answers for a particular institution at a particular time. (If we think about it, this is really all we're doing with respect to policies in just about every other area of institutional life.) It should be added, however, that many universities and their students have had difficulty in thinking and acting rationally and effectively about the complex subject of drugs even though they have been exposed to drug education courses and the like. All too often the institutions have given a smattering of drug education, stated rules which are unrealistic and unenforceable, and offered counseling and medical help which the students have not eagerly sought out.

What follows is a personal statement based on discussions with staff colleagues and students as my own institution has recently began to review its response to drugs. While this is my present thinking, it is open to revision as all such thinking must be, and I share it with you in the hope that it will stimulate thought and discussion among you.

We can begin by stating that the University exists primarily for the advancement of learning and the development of students and therefore policies should serve these ends. Further, these ends can only be served where there is freedom: academic freedom in the traditional sense and personal freedom which respects privacy and the process of exploration and experimentation which are essential to personal growth. Thus we subscribe to the Joint Statement on Student Rights and Freedoms, respect students' right to privacy, bind ourselves to due process, and renounce the doctrine of in loco parentis. This contemporary philosophy of the University's relationship to the student has important implications for the response to drug problems, and student involvement in drugs can have profound implications for the continued freedom of the University.

An obvious element in any university's response to drugs is education. While it is true that today most freshmen come to the university having had some exposure to drug education, both formal and informal, this does not necessarily mean that they know much about drugs anymore than we can assume such knowledge in college administrators. Indeed, some school drug programs are so long on preachment and short on objective information that anything the university may later attempt as 'drug education' will be suspect. Yet the fact remains that students frequently don't know as much as they think they do and some of them are quite uninformed. They are, however, very likely to know mush more about drug usage among their peers than parents, deans, and professors, and the wise would-be drug educator would do well to recognize this fact.

Drug-education programs need not be formal and are probably better otherwise. (Indeed, how many curricula could accommodate them?) There should be an emphasis on factual information when it exists, a willingness

to acknowledge ignorance in the many areas where it still reigns supreme, and an openness toward discussion of the value questions which are critical to the whole issue. No single device works best but here are some suggestions:

- Have residence halls advisers go through a drug information course given by qualified faculty, staff or others. This places reasonably well informed people in the midst of the student body. If your advisers are undergraduates, so much the better.

- During orientation administer a drug information instrument to the freshmen. The results should provide an interesting and effective starting place for discussions with students and qualified staff. Such discussions will be most effective in student residences.

- There are some good, factual, low-pressure publications on drugs available inexpensively from such sources as NIMH. Put some out on a table in the student lounge and see what happens. A published statement of relevant state and federal laws is almost an essential.

- Ask the university bookstore to stock paperbacks on drugs. Make certain there are some good titles but don't censor those that seem less good to you.

- Cooperate with students who have been through drugs, are concerned with drug abuse among their fellow students, and want to help. These concerned students can be excellent sources of information and have better credentials than some of the rest of us. It's important, however, to have these students in touch with counselors, physicians, and other informed members of the university staff.

- Encourage deans, faculty advisers, and student personnel staff in

in general to learn something about drugs so that they may talk sensibly about them when the issue arises in their contacts with students.

- As you and your student advisers may think helpful, bring in knowledgeable resource people: psychologists, pharmacologists, law enforcement people, and the like. There are also films on drugs, but screen them carefully, with student reviewers, before you use them, for some films -- notably those put out by the Armed Services -- have a poor reputation. The administration must be sensitive to the fact that the distribution of anti-drug propaganda as contrasted with educational material could turn the students off.

In summary, there is no single means of drug education. Try different things, keep it cool, keep it objective.

The next kind of response lies in the help the university provides to those who are involved in drugs and are troubled by them. We would do well to recognize that there are many such students on our campuses. We would also do well to realize that the 'obvious' resources on campus (e.g., counseling and medical services, the chaplaincy) may sometimes not be the places students turn to, and we should ask ourselves why. Are these services viewed as part of the academic establishment, too much aligned with the university administration? Are these services in effect presenting themselves to students in ways which suggest that drug involvement is not part of their regular concern? Or is the administration placing them in an ambivalent position? There may be other questions. All are worth exploring for they are aimed at the responsiveness of student services to student needs.

Also, as an institution considers counseling help for students it

should carefully consider faculty and staff outside student personnel services who may have personal qualities and professional knowledge that particularly qualify these persons as resources.

Certainly a key issue is confidentiality. We have to recognize that in many states the lawyers who write legislation provide privileged communication only for themselves. Yet within those limits the university can adopt policies of reasonable confidentiality and make them clearly known to students. It is also important that there be clear -- and public -- groundrules concerning how and for what purposes any information about students is shared.

Some students will recognize their own problems and seek out help without prompting from others. As indicated above, they will be encouraged to do so if they know their confidences will be respected and believe the helping agencies are concerned, knowledgeable, and non-judgmental.

There are other students who need help but have not faced the fact themselves. The opportunity to encourage them to seek help is presented whenever drug abuse manifests itself clearly to others. For example, when a student's residence adviser has to talk him down from a bad trip or when his behavior in class or elsewhere on campus clearly indicates to teachers or others that drugs are interfering with his effectiveness as a student, his need for help can properly be raised with him. While one can rarely if ever force a person into an effective counseling relationship, it is a mistake for the university to let such transparent incidents of drug abuse pass without a response.

Initially, of course, the response must be to help in the acute situation (e.g., the bad trip), but there is an equal if not greater responsibility afterwards to encourage the drug-abusing student to face his problem with

help. When the student genuinely seeks such help and is making a real effort to cope, the university should be supportive even if there are occasional lapses and progress is sometimes discouraging.

There comes a point, however, when a student's unwillingness to help himself or serious inability to cope with his problem calls for intervention by the institution. This point can only be judged by knowledgeable and concerned persons after careful review of the circumstances. The judgment should be made administratively on the basis of appraisals by medical staff, counseling psychologists, and like persons. If the judgment points to separation, the action should not be disciplinary but akin to the medical separation which is well established in universities. The university should clearly indicate at the time of its decision willingness to re-admit the student when there's evidence that his problem is in hand.

Some of the most effective helping and drug-education agencies are the clinics, drop-in centers, and so on which are usually found off campus. These are often run by people who have been through drugs and whose help is often therefore -far more acceptable than that of straight counselors or physicians. The university should know about such agencies and use them as resources when appropriate. Similarly, some hospitals have set up special detoxification units, and college health services should know how and when to refer patients to these units. Students both on and off campus, occasionally run 'crash pads' and crisis-response teams. There are legal as well as other implications which make the desirability of university-sponsored crash pads questionable but there can be responsible ways students might be encouraged to help each other more effectively (for example, drug alert teams to help a student through a bad trip), and the

university can both guide and backstop them in their efforts.

The question of regulations and discipline is difficult. While the university can not condone the illegal use of drugs, it need not assume the impossible task of duplicating public law with its own regulations against possession, use, and so on. Neither should it take upon itself the duty of enforcing all public laws. Rather, it should write its regulations to protect its own academic purposes and community life where these are reasonably separable from society's at large and where the instituion can reasonably expect to deal with the problem itself.

Specifically, use and possession in and of themselves are probably inappropraite for disciplinary action since they ordinarily do not directly affect the interests of others. However, where persistent use adversely affects the living conditions of others, say, in university housing, such use may properly invite disciplinary action. So may anti-social behavior associated with drug use.

Students who engage in sale, distribution, or improper transfer of drugs certainly present a threat to the university community and should be disciplined. There can be difficult problems of degree here, and there is no escaping the need for judgment. Yet generally speaking the academic community recognizes the distinction between supplying and use and accepts corresponding differences in institutional response.

What is less often recognized is that, just as there are certain kinds of behavior for which institutional discipline is inappropriate, so are there other kinds which are so serious that the university cannot cope with them itself. In this category would be the substantial selling of any drugs -- the real pushing which takes place in almost every university community

of any size. It might also very well include an even more modest business in the hard drugs. The threat posed here goes beyond the university community into the wider society, and the university has no business dealing with such problems in isolation. Such activities are criminal to a degree far beyond the delinquency that college rules can cope with, and the institution and its members have a clear duty to share actionable information about such activities with the police.

Failure to act in this way will create legal sanctuary in ways that society will not -- and clearly should not -- accept. Such failure will invite the hostile attention of society and may eventually jeopardize the academic freedom essential to the university's prime mission. The academic community should always remember that freedoms are not absolute and that its freedoms in particular are a grant-in-trust from society at large. They can be taken away. #'Benign neglect,' though often a policy by default, is not the answer. Rather, the answer lies in balancing the institution's respect for individual privacy with the interests of others and the preservation of the academic community and its purposes. This can be done by affirmatively responding to ignorance, cries for help, and the need to protect both the university and society at large.